



May 11, 2011

Honorable Ben Nevers
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Louisiana State Senate
Via Email: neversb@legis.state.la.us

Dear Senator Nevers:

We write to you as the leadership of the associations representing the nation's 105 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as senior, seasoned presidents of HBCUs that have worked closely with Southern University for many years, and as a leader of the association of public land-grant colleges and universities, to respectfully request that you reject Senate Bill 183 or any measure that will merge Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO) and the University of New Orleans (UNO).

According to the NCHEMS data, and other disinterested sources, the proposed merger will not reduce the cost of meeting the higher education needs of the residents of New Orleans. The immediate fiscal impact appears to be estimated at somewhere between \$2.2M and \$3.5 million. The proposed merger does not appear to create a more efficient operation, nor does it appear that it will expand education opportunities for students who are underserved in the current higher education system in Louisiana. There is no evidence to suggest that it will increase graduation rates. To the contrary, the merger will likely have a direct, adverse impact on the students, families, and communities currently being served by SUNO. It will also have an unintended residual adverse impact on the HBCU community of colleges nationwide.

The Postsecondary Education Review Commission (PERC) that you so ably led through months of reviews, dialogues and hearings, thoroughly assessed and debated the critical considerations relating to the possibility of closing or merging SUNO with another institution. With your support, PERC voted not to close or merge SUNO in February, 2010. In reaching the conclusion that neither a merger nor closure of SUNO was the way to meet the goals of increasing higher education efficiencies, effectiveness and education outcomes, PERC recognized, among other things, that SUNO plays a vitally important role in not only educating diverse constituencies in the City of New Orleans, but also that SUNO is a vitally important component of the Southern University System, the nation's only HBCU system.

As the nation's only HBCU system Southern University is uniquely and strategically positioned to develop, test and model a higher education pipeline for transitioning traditionally underserved students from elementary and secondary school, through college, graduate and professional school, and into a career. Of greater importance is the fact that neither the Southern University System nor any of its individual colleges, universities, graduate or professional schools succeeds or fails alone. The urban education, criminal justice, entrepreneurship, transformative social work and other unique course offerings at SUNO are important for the other 105 HBCUs and

PBIs. The HBCU community has just arrived at the point where, through the use of technology, HBCUs across the nation will be able to have their students gain the benefit of the unique disciplines offered at SUNO. Already, the 105 HBCUs are sending some of their best and brightest graduates to the Southern University Law School. It is just one of five in the nation.

The 105 HBCUs are interdependent and interconnected. They share research, programs, curricula, professional development, and work collaboratively to better prepare, inspire and connect diverse students, including those who can excel at any institution in the world. They prepare disproportionate numbers of low-income, first generation students, and students who come from low-performing schools. If you destabilize or shake the foundation of one of the nation's HBCUs, especially the nation's only HBCU system, Mr. Chairman, it will inevitably and undoubtedly have a direct and damaging impact on this mission-based class of American colleges and universities that is doing the lion's share of graduating African American students in growth and high needs disciplines that will help this nation to thrive again.

On behalf of the entire community of HBCUs, we respectfully urge you to reject Senate Bill 183 or any other measure to merge SUNO, especially at this time. At a minimum, because there will be no immediate affirmative economic impact, and no financial savings; because the merger will require an immediate financial increase, we recommend that you table the measure and allow for a thoughtful consideration of a number of options for meeting the educational needs of the students currently served by SUNO and those whose education needs are not currently being met. We stand ready to assist in any manner.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernest McNealy
President, Stillman College &
Chairman, NAFEO Board of Directors

William R. Harvey
President, Hampton University

Mary Evans Sias
President, Kentucky State University

cc: Honorable Bobby Jindal
Governor, State of Louisiana